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SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: "SALTENOS" WELCOME AMBASSADOR'S APRIL  
28 VISIT; YOUTH OUTREACH AND COUNTER-NARCOTICS TOP ISSUES

Ref: Buenos Aires 225

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Summary  
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11. (SBU) Ambassador Wayne made his third visit to Argentina's northwestern province of Salta on April 28. The province is gearing up for national congressional mid-term elections on June 28, with three of its seven deputy seats in play; the province's shifting coalitions partially reflect major national alliances and appear to portend a two or three-way division of the seats. The Ambassador presided with Salta Governor Uturbey at the official opening of a USG-sponsored training for the regional Center for Drug Information (CDI) network. The Governor also accompanied the Ambassador to a donation of baseball equipment to youth and adult representatives of the six teams in Salta's long-running baseball league, and he also joined the Ambassador at a match between the U.S. national women's field hockey team and Argentina's own, "Las Leonas." The Ambassador presented certificates the evening of April 28 to 55 enthusiastic middle school/high school-aged recipients of USG grants to study English through the binational center in Salta. Luncheon remarks on bilateral relations and at an FCS-organized event promoting tourism in Orlando rounded out the Ambassador's full schedule. The Ambassador was greeted positively at all events, and the provincial press covered the event in print, radio and television. Key issues raised by the press included U.S. views of Argentina's economy, swine flu, and aspects of U.S. cooperation with the Province. End Summary.

Governor Uturbey Describes a Positive Record  
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12. (SBU) Salta's young, Kirchner-allied governor Juan Manuel Uturbey, narrowly elected in 2007 against another pro-Kirchner Peronist, greeted the Ambassador at the airport on April 28. Uturbey thanked the Ambassador for supporting his participation in the Americas Competitiveness Forum in August 2008 and said that he hoped to institute changes in the province to make it more attractive to foreign investment. He said that the province was suffering a 17-20% decline in central-government provided revenue due to the economic crisis, but that his team had planned for a decline and was managing it. Moreover, he was drawing down some current reserves in anticipation of soy export tax co-participation funds that the province could begin receiving in June. He was hurrying the funds out, he said, because the end of the Salta rainy season was approaching and it was the best time for infrastructure

work. Uturbey emphasized the decentralized nature of his approach, in which 50% of co-participation funds were dedicated to municipalities which were allowed to select their own projects.

¶3. (SBU) Uturbey thanked the USG for its support for counter-drug operations in Salta, saying that nonetheless the problem was big: "let's speak clearly," he said, "the problem is from Bolivia and probably 80% of cocaine coming into Argentina comes through Salta." He said that provincial-national law enforcement cooperation was good. The Governor also described provincial efforts to combat trafficking in persons, saying that the province had freed 30 adolescent victims from their traffickers in recent months. He also noted the creation of a provincial office dedicated to domestic violence.

¶4. (U) Ambassador shared his condolences over the February landslide in the provincial city of Tartagal, which cost lives and destroyed houses and businesses. He also inquired about provincial efforts to address the outbreak of dengue fever. Uturbey noted the problem was serious, though not necessarily worse than outbreaks in 1998 and 2004, and that provincial programs were established to deal with the health emergency. (Note: There are at least 1,200 confirmed cases of Dengue in the province; printed dengue advisories were available at several stores in the city of Salta. End Note.)

#### Counter-Drug Cooperation

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¶5. (U) Governor Uturbey and Provincial Minister of

Justice, Security, and Human Rights Dr. Pablo Kosiner participated with the Ambassador the morning of April 28 in opening a DEA-organized regional training conference for Southern Cone Center for Drug Information (CDI), previously seated in Bolivia. (Note: Argentina's Minister of Justice Anibal Fernandez had agreed that the Federal Police (PFA) could manage the network following DEA's expulsion from Bolivia, and the head of the PFA's counter-drug unit was also in attendance at the launch. INCLE-funds were used to support this regional training, organized by DEA Buenos Aires Country Office. End Note).

¶6. (U) Following the Ambassador's remarks on the value of the CDI program and the importance of Argentine collaboration against drug trafficking, Dr. Kosiner lamented the insidious effects of drug trafficking, noting that an entire economy had formed both trading in drugs and using drugs as a currency. Uturbey underscored the importance of joint efforts against narcotics, passionately referring to the dangers illicit drugs posed to Argentine children.

#### Questions about President Obama, Economy, Drugs

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¶7. (U) The Ambassador was the featured speaker April 28 at a luncheon organized by the University of Rio de la Plata Foundation (FURP), Salta Branch, a event featuring politicians, provincial officials (including Governor Uturbey) and local leaders of all stripes (an audience of 45-50). The questioners and FURP President Luis Rosales noted the non-partisan nature of the event and responded well to the Ambassador's description of bilateral relations, particularly the opportunities for enhanced ties. Questioners asked about U.S. domestic policies (stem cells and narcotics), U.S. perspectives on Argentina's economy and the bilateral partnership, the global economic crisis. Local paper "El Tribuno" focused its coverage on the Ambassador's statement that the USG viewed Argentina as under no greater threat in the global economic downturn than were countries in many other regions. (Note: This was in reference to unofficial remarks by the CIA Director in February that were interpreted here as an official, negative USG assessment

of Argentina's prospects, per reftel. End Note.)

#### Baseballs and English Instruction

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¶8. (U) Two events facilitated by the Public Affairs Section generated significant goodwill and press coverage in Salta. The first was a donation of baseball equipment provided by Major League Baseball to Salta's youth and adult league, comprised of six clubs. (Note: One radio interviewer later that evening noted that the Ambassador had promised to provide equipment during his July 2008 visit to the city, and now he had delivered. End Note.) Children from each club were in attendance to receive the bats, balls, helmets, and gloves, all eager to break out the equipment. One player showed the Ambassador the cracked and crumbling batting helmet with which the team had been making do. Governor Uturbey also attended, and spoke to the importance of recreational opportunities for youth. Later, the Ambassador participated in the opening of the fourth match in Salta between the United States women's field hockey team and their popular Argentine counterpart, "Las Leonas." Governor Uturbey arrived later to watch part of the game with the Ambassador.

¶9. (U) The second highly positive event was the awarding of certificates to 55 teenage students chosen to receive free English language instruction through the local Binational Center (BNC). This ceremony was the first in welcoming over 300 grant recipients in a total of four BNCs around the country under the Embassy's English Access Microscholarship Program, providing opportunities to lower income, high performing students who would not otherwise be able to study English. All but two of the selected youth were at the event, along with parents and teachers, and almost all returned after the presentations for a second photo with the Ambassador.

#### Promoting Orlando

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¶10. (U) Ambassador also spoke briefly at an event organized by Orlando's tourism promotion office and

attended as well by the Embassy's Foreign Commercial Service. Approximately 32 tour operators and several provincial officials were in attendance. The Ambassador described the value of tourism to both countries in building mutual understanding and noted that Argentine visa recipients had increased at a 14% year-on-year from March 2008 to March 2009, one of the highest in South America.

#### Positive Press

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¶11. (U) The Ambassador's visit received ample and positive press coverage in the local media. The province's two leading broadcast television and radio stations, Canal 11 and AM840 Radio Salta covered his activities extensively. So did the main and most traditional newspaper in the province, "El Tribuno," which is read through the entire northwestern region of the country and whose coverage focused on the drug-enforcement conference. A cable TV program made a special coverage of the baseball equipment donation. The Ambassador's visit was also mentioned in a story related to drug-enforcement in the country's second-largest newspaper, "La Nacion."

#### Politics in the Province

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¶12. (SBU) The Ambassador's visit came at a time of active politicking in Salta as parties and leaders position themselves for the June 28 national elections. On the margins of the Ambassador's visit, Political Officer met with national deputy Zulema Daher, the Province's one

"dissident" Peronist deputy (allied with Felipe Sola), and with national Senator Juan Perez Alsina, of the Partido Renovador ("Renewal"). Both, along with academics at the FURP lunch, described a province dominated by Peronism, but in which Peronism was itself divided both by leadership rivalries and by differing views about Kirchnerism. Septel will describe their points of view in detail; both viewed it as less than likely that Uturbey's Kirchner-aligned Peronist Party (PJ) could gain more than one of the three contested seats. Both also said that the Kirchners no longer played well in the province, in part a legacy of the 2008 agricultural dispute.

Comment

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¶13. (SBU) Salta is relatively receptive terrain for the U.S. message, evidenced by the effort its well-spoken, influential, and Kirchner-allied governor made both to welcome and be seen with the U.S. Ambassador. The Embassy's modest but well targeted assistance to youth was a big hit.

WAYNE